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The Random Recollections of an old Playgoer

etch
some old
Theatres



BY J. W. FLYNN.





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THE RANDOM
RECOLLECTIONS
OF
AN OLD PLAY-GOER.

A Sketch of some Old Cork Theatres.

BY
J. W. FLYNN.

"We'll pluck the roses that still spring upon the grave of buried time."

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In Memoriam.

“THE OLD PLAY-GOER.”

“Ah me! but those triumphs, Charley, they were few and too far
between.”—G. R. SIMS.





THE RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OLD PLAY-GOER.

A Sketch of some Old Cork Theatres.

THERE are few things in this world's experience more strangely blended of the bitter and the sweet than the theatrical retrospections of one who has been accustomed to view closely the doings of the little world on the stage ; few things are more unutterably sad than to trace with the mind's eye the havoc of Time and Death amongst those gay, bright spirits that people the little world of the drama. Those who have been play-goers for years of their lifetime have many delightful reminiscences of the time they devoted to acquiring a knowledge of plays and players. Such remembrances are cherished in most men's minds with a tender, almost reverential regard. As a long life runs its course the mind often turns to the past, to gather from the contemplation of memory's hidden treasures such pleasures as perhaps we look in vain for in the present, or to glean some new diversion from things that have already yielded abundant amusement. As life's dial-shade creeps closer to the inevitable sunset, we are apt to place ever a higher value on the golden memories that link us to a bright and happy past. How dearly we love these things ! To some there is

joy in the mere memory of a name ; to others the very recollection of a dulcet voice, long since hushed in the chill silence of the tomb, will bring a flood of happy thoughts. And tears will come unchecked at the words of some old song that pleased us when the delight of life was new to us, and ere those things that make mankind ambitious turned to dust and ashes at our touch, some simple strain that we loved ere the light of our earlier days departed, and our youth, lizard-like, changed its bright tints for the sombre hue of sober unromantic middle age !

“ There’s music in the olden song—
Yea, e’en ecstatic are the tears
Which will steal down our smiles among,
Roused by the sounds of other years.”

And truly there are no songs we love like the old songs, even though sometimes our hearts be so full that we cannot sing them. With a deep regard for the art of bygone ages we treasure our household gods, the costly pictures, the hoard of quaint and curious plate, the antique figures in bronze and china, or the sculptured marbles that typify the genius which inspired, and the culture which guided, the handicraft of other and greater ages. Yet, with what deeper feelings are we wont to regard those precious things gathered in the storehouse of the heart, those rare figures niched in “the corridors of time” that will never fade from our sight till we go down “to dumb forgetfulness a prey”—forms and faces of the radiant beings whose voices seem to come back to us at times, through the long vista of unforgotten years, in the tones that erstwhile thrilled us to the heart’s core ! And memory bridges lightly over the great gulf of time,

“ As the dear notes of some sweet air
By lips long silent warbled o’er,
Come back to stir the heart once more,
And even while grasped are hushed away.”

For us these beautiful memories of the past, that seem “like sweet thoughts in a dream,” are imperishable, priceless ; they wake our souls, which have mayhap grown dull and slumberous in the weary march of life, to the ecstasy of happy recollections ; they give us once more a gleam of the light that shone upon our pathway when the garland of youth was fresh-wreathed upon our brows, and when all the glory and beauty, the sweetness and grace of life, filled our hearts full of serenest

joy. As the sweet scent of some flowers—the simple mignonette perfuming fragrantly the breath of summer morn, the homely old-fashioned wallflower, or the odour of dead rose leaves—suggests with subtle power other times and other people, so the triumphs of histrionic genius, when we witness them now, bring to mind the great men and women who long ago won our first love for Shakespeare on the stage; they bring to us too the thought of those who shared our pleasures *then*, and the thought pains us with sweet sad regret for the dead flowers of the past—the loves and the friendships—that no longer gladden us with their blooming.

Some such thoughts as these came thronging, I am sure, to the mind of the Old Playgoer (whose genial presence brought brightness to many a festive gathering), as he gave me his recollections of the old Cork theatres. It is only in such personal recollections we can trace anything of the checkered history of the old theatres in Cork, for there is no record else—not even playbills, I think—to show what was done in the old theatres long ago. Probably the first theatre ever built in Cork was one which stood, early in the last century, in Dingle Lane, off the North Main Street. Another was afterwards run up in Broad Lane, but had ceased to exist before 1736. In that year a regular theatre was opened at the corner of George's Street and Prince's Street, but it was only a small place. In 1760 the "Theatre Royal," in George's Street, was built and opened under the management of Spranger Barry. In 1840 this theatre was accidentally burned down. In 1850 a circus was built by a man named Pablo Fanque on the site of that old theatre. A short time afterwards this circus was transformed into a theatre by Mr. Richard Burke, and a theatre it remained till it was taken some thirteen years ago by the Postal Department, and transformed into the present General Post Office. It was in this old theatre, in 1766, a singular exhibition was witnessed one night. A tailor named Patrick Redmond was hanged at "Gallows Green" for some "robbery with violence," or some such offence, then punishable with the death penalty, and it fell out that when the body was cut down and taken away to be buried, an actor named Glover, who happened to be present, suggested to the friends of the deceased that it would be a good thing if he tried his hand at restoring the "dead man." They gladly acceded to the request, and, after

a good deal of hard work, the apparently dead man was brought round, to the joy of his "pals." Of course, the tailor had not been given a "drop" by the hangman, but was simply hanged in the old-fashioned way of tying the rope round his neck and then pulling the cart from under him, so that when he was cut down he was merely half-strangled. The next night the victim of the law attended the theatre, though urged not to do so. The first actor who appeared was the man who had done the "restoring," whereupon the "dead man" made such a demonstration that he narrowly escaped a second arrest. However, in the confusion his friends got him away, and he was got out of the country. The sheriff was in the theatre at the time but generously affected not to know what was going on. There were other theatres in Cork. One called the "Apollo" theatre stood where the office of the *Cork Examiner* is now. In 1779 a little theatre was opened in Henry Street, near the Mansion House, but none of these lived long. It was in the George's Street and the Cook Street houses the best productions always took place. Let me try to revive some of the recollections of these theatres as they came to me through my friend the Old Playgoer, let me try to tell you some of his stories as he would have told them to you, to write them down as he would have written them.

"Yes," said the Old Play-goer, "I remember some of the old theatres—Collins's Pavilion, the Cook Street, the Mary Street, and the George's Street theatres principally. The Mary Street house was rather a rough-and-tumble sort of place. Collins's didn't count with the other two. It was a cheap theatre, but it was a capital place of amusement, and a sort of training school for the regular theatres. Two of the principal theatres may be said to have ended in smoke; for while that of Cook Street is devoted to the manufacture of tobacco, its fellow of Mary Street has been converted to the "base uses" of a coal store.

I remember one very ludicrous incident occurring at the Mary Street theatre. They were playing "Green Bushes,"

then a great favourite. The chief character was undertaken by a lady who was announced in the following fashion—

MIAMI—Miss Delavelle Barrington. (The recent marriage and retirement of Miss Helen Faucit has left this lady in sole possession of the tragic throne.)

Well, unfortunately, the regal dignity of a queen of tragedy is apt to get a bit ruffled at times. It happened this way with the Mary Street queen. Towards the end of the play you will remember "Miami," finding in the developments of the drama that she is not particularly wanted by anybody, commits suicide by jumping into the Mississippi, exclaiming, "River of my race, receive me!" When she reached the usual eminence of scenic rocks, poor Miss B. found to her dismay that no mattress had been placed in the imaginary "river," for her to jump on. To make matters worse, it so happened that the ledge of rock confining the "river" was too low to hide the actress from the audience. Down Miss B. came, however, on the bare boards, with a hard thud, and the confusion of her position was increased tenfold when a voice in the region of the gods sang out in the flattest of native accents, "Oh, be japers, 'tis frozen!"—a remark which set the house in a roar. The persons who ought to have come out on a raft to rescue the drowning heroine were so confused by the awkward mishap that they were ashamed to make their appearance. Then the sole possessor of the tragic throne, finding that the river of her race would not receive her, inasmuch as a large portion of her dorsal region was still visible over the rocks, distractedly crawled off the stage on all-fours, amid shrieks of laughter from an unsympathetic audience.

A good story was once told of the great Miss Cushman in the days of the old Cook Street house. She was a very ugly woman, but a really fine actress. In such parts as "Meg Merriles," in the old play of "Guy Mannering," she was superb, and her acting in "cave scene" always made a deep impression. When passing over the stage one day after a rehearsal she came face to face with a scene-shifter who was popularly said to be the ugliest man in Cork. Gazing at him intently for a few seconds with those piercing eyes of hers, Miss Cushman heaved a sigh of satisfaction, and taking out her purse, gave the man a piece of gold. When the poor fellow broke out into profuse thanks, the eccentric actress

raised a finger and said scornfully, "Don't thank me, my good man. It is an offering of thanksgiving to Providence that I have *at last* met someone uglier than myself!"

My memory reaches back to many brilliant nights in the old Cork theatre, when such men as Kean, Macready, Brooke, Forrest, and others, held sway, and when the genius of Helen Faucit shone like a bright particular star in our theatrical firmament; when such artistes as Ellen Tree, Celeste, Vestris, Ternan, Glynn, and some of less note, delighted the public with a display of their gifts; when the voices of such singers as Romer—the sweetest English songstress of her day—Catherine Hayes, Louisa Pyne, Grisi, Mario, Sims Reeves, Alboni, and a host of others, charmed all lovers of music. We were able to get "stars" at a short notice then, because we had a stock company of our own. Such a stock company! The great "provider" of our theatricals was Frank Seymour, of the Cook Street, or Royal Victoria, Theatre. Of all the strange men ever found in the theatrical circle, poor Frank Seymour was surely the strangest. He was popularly known as "Chouse," because on one occasion when playing "Othello" at Limerick he, in the well-known passage—

"Excellent wench! Perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again"—

pronounced the word "chaos" as if written "chouse." Afterwards whenever he was announced to play in Limerick, the saying amongst playgoers was, "Chouse is come again." Seymour hated the nickname, and it is recorded of him that one night when he was playing "Othello," in the "dying scene," a voice from the gallery roared out, "That's d——n good, Chouse." Then the audience witnessed a singular spectacle. "Othello" sat bolt upright, shook his fist first in the direction of the disturber, and, in a voice of rage, invited him if he were *a man* to come down and have his head punched. There being no answer to the challenge, the hapless Moor solemnly turned over and proceeded to die, to an *obligato* of titters from the pit.

I remember Barry Sullivan, the tragedian, speaking of Frank Seymour once at a public banquet as having been called Frank "Schemer" by some who knew him. I fear Barry Sullivan was right. I will nothing extenuate, nor

set down ought in malice. "Chouse" has many years gone to where quarter sessions cease from troubling and bum-bailiffs are at rest. His poverty, and not his will, consented, I am sure, to the remarkable dodges to which at one time he was obliged to resort.

I am afraid the stock company very often went without their salaries. There was a very angry scene one day on the subject of salary, and a very remarkable member of the company, old Mrs. Seyton, denounced Frank furiously, as "You, Frank Seymour, the very boards of whose stage are enseamed with the sweat of unpaid artistes!" She said afterwards, in describing the scene—"I thought that very fine, but the dickens a ha'penny it knocked out of him." Frank might probably with much truth have pleaded—

"The times are dull, and all that we receive
Will hardly satisfy the day's expense;"

for in those days it was quite as hard to draw the Cork public as it ever has been since. The poor stock company were very often in very low water indeed, but no lower than that in which poor Frank himself stood. As an actor he had no real ability whatever. Off the stage he was a good sort of fellow enough, though like many of the old sort of staggers there was always an air of "Othello," or some other character about him. I see him in my mind's eye now—a low-sized stout man, with an air of threadbare neatness which was rather depressing in the reality. His rusty black gloves used to irritate me very much. On the stage he was a mere parrot. He brought no strength of intellect to bear on the arduous tasks he essayed. He did his best, poor soul, and he meant well, even if he achieved very little. Like Eccles, in that sweet play, *Caste*, Frank Seymour did everything "with the best intintions," and that covered a multitude of his dramatic sins. He often repeated his lines in a play apparently without the least grasp of their real meaning. For instance, on one occasion when the line—

"Beyond this forest is the Torza's bank,"

occurred in the text, Frank, who had some recollection of the sound but not the sense of the correct words, rendered it glibly—

"Beyond this forest is the torrid zone,"

whereupon a grinning and perspiring individual in the crowded gallery roared out, "Be my sowl I thought so, we're all so hot up here!" The best character Frank played was the "Ghost" in "Hamlet," and that he played better than anyone else I ever saw in the part. He was naturally adapted for it, because he had a voice that seemed to come up from his boots, it was so deep.

I think the worst thing I ever heard about Frank was a trick he played a distinguished Italian singer, I quite forget the lady's name, who sang for him in Cook Street. The guileless creature probably did not know what manner of man Frank was, or she would not have trusted him to the extent she did. The last night of the engagement came and he explained to the lady that she would receive her money in the morning. She explained that she was leaving Cork next morning. Frank said that it was all right; there would be just time to get money from the bank before the coach started from Pembroke Street for Dublin. Railway trains were unknown to Cork at that time. The lady said "all right," but secretly determined that if Frank didn't turn up in time she would delay her departure. Next morning, just as the coach was about to start, and just as the distinguished lady had determined to get out, down came Frank with breathless speed, and thrust a packet which apparently contained a number of bank-notes into the lady's hand. Then there was an effusive farewell, "good-bye, God bless you," a clasp of the hand, and off started the coach. The lady stuck the packet into her bag, and at once busied herself looking after her *impedimenta*. When the coach was about twenty miles away the artiste took it into her head to count her money. Unsuspecting creature! When she opened the packet she found (alas, that I should have to confess it!) that instead of bank-notes she had only *a few of Frank's playbills* folded up tightly.

I cannot remember half the strange things done by Frank and his stock company. The gallant actors and actresses, who nightly made such a fine show, playing

"The ancient heroes and fall of princes,
With loud applause,"

were, in the searching daylight, a very seedy lot. The most interesting figure in the group, next to Frank himself, was

Mrs. Seyton, who did heavy parts. Poor Mrs. Seyton! I used to meet her in the passages of the theatre, rushing in "to be on in time," and used to sadly note, in her shabby clothes, her battered old bonnet, and her broken boots, the evidences of her impoverished condition. She was a good-humoured creature, and always seemed inclined to make the best of everything. Sometimes she would, indeed, take "a darn," as she called it, too much. She was frail in this respect. The Queen, in "Hamlet," was her great part, and when she came to the lines in the last scene, "The drink, the drink, I am poisoned!" there was a laugh always, and the fellows said, with a shake of the head, "Lord knows, if the drink was poisoning you, you'd be dead long ago!" But poor Mrs. Seyton, with all her faults, was a most useful actress. She was deeply attached to the "profession." 'Twas not that she loved her art the less, but that she loved "unsweetened" more; and sometimes her gait on the boards was a little less than queenly. One evening that I sat next to Charles Kean at dinner, at G——'s hospitable board, we spoke of Mrs. Seyton. "What a queer old woman she is!" Kean said to me: "Last night, when I stood between her and the ghost, I was like a side of bacon being salted. I am sure she was trying to steady herself, but she really annoyed me the way she kept drawing her hands over me." Yet, though Mrs. Seyton was not always very steady on her pins, she was nevertheless invariably word-perfect, never missing a syllable of her lines. I once had an amusing instance of her pride in this respect. One night, the prompter having asked me to take his place for a few minutes, I did so. "Romeo and Juliet" was the play that night. Mrs. Seyton having made an unusual pause in a portion of her lines, I thought that she needed the word, and I gave it. The actress flashed a withering look at me, and I felt that I had put my foot in it some way. When the act finished, Mrs. Seyton came to me, and, shaking a warning finger at me, said angrily:

"Don't dare to do that again!"

"Do what?" I asked.

"Prompt *me* in Shakespeare—the very idea of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "In any of the ordinary plays it would be perhaps well enough, or even I might drop a word in Sheridan Knowles, but in Shakespeare—never!"

To tell the truth, she was wonderfully word-perfect in Shakespeare parts, though, I'm afraid, her interpretation of the text was not that of a scholar. Poor Mrs. Seyton, I heard, spent her last years in the workhouse. I believe that once or twice, when she was sharing "the Poor-Law's tender mercy," she was actually taken out of the workhouse to play the Queen in "Hamlet," and when she had strutted and fretted her hour upon the stage, was allowed to go back to the workhouse, sadly exchanging the purple and fine linen of Elsinore for the wincey and coarse calico of Skahabeg.*

There was one memorable occasion in the old days when the public were very near witnessing the play of "Hamlet" without the accustomed Ghost. It came about in this way. "Hamlet" was being played for Seymour's benefit, and the redoubted manager was, of course, the Ghost; but, unfortunately for him, some nasty creditor, destitute of every vestige of dramatic sympathy, had set the law in motion, and the bailiffs, failing to find Frank at home, stationed themselves at the theatre door for the purpose of arresting him for debt. The evening wore on, and there was no appearance of Frank. Shortly before the time for commencing the performance, when the people were coming in very numerous, several parcels and boxes were delivered at the door where the bailiffs were, and presently a rough-looking coffin, with a cloth over it, was brought up.

"What's that for?" asked one of the bailiffs, in awe-struck tones. "Lord be praised, what a place to bring a coffin!"

"This is a new coffin for the grave-scene in 'Hamlet,'" explained one of the theatre men, as they trundled the dismal object in.

Soon afterwards the bailiffs were amazed to hear the sound of loud and general applause in the theatre. On going in to see what was the matter, the bailiffs found, to their dismay, that Frank was on the stage. He had gone in between them snugly ensconced in "the coffin for Ophelia." Once inside the theatre, of course, he was in a position to parry the legal weapon.

Ellen Tree, who afterwards was married to Charles Kean, came to Cork early in the forties—it was '41 or '42, I think. Her "Juliet" was a most captivating one. In the play of

* The district in which the workhouse is situated.

"A Roland for an Oliver" she sang a waltzing song, which quite won the hearts of the audience. A new play of Sheridan Knowles' was produced during that engagement, called "Love." In that engagement also Barry Sullivan played minor parts, Henderson being principal. The newspapers at that time spoke of Barry Sullivan as "a very promising actor." Ellen Tree was a great favourite in Cork, not only then, but whenever she came afterwards. In those days we had representations of Shakespeare which I have not, so far as the principals are concerned, seen equalled since.

The actresses in those days were women whose devotion to their work was something wonderful to witness. There was Helen Faucit—what a recollection it is! Hers was then a name to conjure with, because it was the name of a woman whose great genius, spotless life, and honourable name shed the brightest lustre on her profession. She was loved and respected by the few who were privileged to know her in private life, and she was idolized by the public. Even after all the years which have passed since then, I feel that it was one of the greatest pleasures of my life to have seen Helen Faucit, and to have had the privilege of even a slight acquaintance with her. A plain-faced woman, with no great figure, she had eyes that were truly the windows of her soul, and a voice that could express every emotion, either of melting tenderness or fierce passion, with equal facility. In its softest tones,

" 'Twas like the stealing
Of summer's wind through some wreathed shell,"

and in the love-passages of "Romeo and Juliet," and such plays of the tender passion, the "whispered balm" of her accents went straight to the hearts of the spectators. I can never forget the crowds that went to Cook Street to see her, or how the audience used to follow her every line, or how the flashes of her matchless declamation roused us to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, while her "melting mood" drew tears from the least impressionable amongst the spectators. Helen Faucit had the sweetest voice I ever heard. I think I liked her Rosalind best; but, indeed, whatever part she played—whether Ophelia, Juliet, Desdemona, Julia, Isabella (in "The Fatal Marriage"), Belvidera ("Venice Preserved"), or any other—she was certain to give the public the best

rendering of the character. From the time she first came to Cork, a very young girl, Cork people always seemed to take great interest in Helen Faucit. Look here, in this old volume of plays you may read a scrap pasted in there by hands that have long since been folded in their last rest. It is an extract from the *Cork Examiner* of December 3rd, 1841—"It affords us sincere pleasure to witness the many professional triumphs of this exemplary and highly-gifted young lady." Then it gives an extract from the *Court Journal* of the time. It is a poem on Helen Faucit's playing of Nina Sforza :—

"Most gifted lady ! what a noble dower
Hast thou derived from Heaven, thus to roll
The tide of passion o'er us, till the spell
Of thy transcendent genius brings the tears
That save the heart from bursting !"

And then it breathes, you will observe, a kind wish for her future :—

"O, be happy ! may that graceful brow
Bend with no darker shade than now,
Nor thy pure spirit know a deeper gloom."

—a wish fulfilled in Miss Faucit's happy marriage about ten years later. At the time the verses were written, the great actress was, I think, playing with Macready in London. A couple of years later she came to Cork again, and didn't we give her a reception ! You will see here again, in this old book, an extract from a notice written by a Cork critic at that time. It is again from the *Cork Examiner*. The date is July 31st, 1844, and the critic gives you a much better idea of the impression created by Helen Faucit's acting than I can hope to give you. Having remarked that years have passed since Miss Faucit trod the boards in Cork, and that she was then a young and inexperienced girl, though full of promise, he says :—"But oh, how changed !—what a glorious transition from the clever yet inexperienced girl to the enchantress who yields every passion of the human breast, and holds men spellbound by her genius, for it is *that*. Her voice alone is a whole choir of instruments ; at one time soul-searching in its whisper, thrilling in its delicious tenderness ; at another, impetuous in the hurricane of the heart's emotion. Every tone is music—every gesture stirred

eloquence ; yet so unstudied, so unartificial—no rule to guide save the inward spirit, and that is the spirit of genius.”

Helen Faucit was then in the fulness of her powers. As “Pauline” in the “Lady of Lyons,” she was, I think, better liked by the public than in anything else. Her treatment of the “cottage scene,” her hysterical rage when she turns on her husband to reproach him with his baseness was a sight to see. Though I have seen the best actresses since then in that part, I would not name one of them in the same breath with her.

In the character of Lady Macbeth, Helen Faucit seemed to utterly lose her identity. I can never forget the horrified expression on the faces of the audiences when the great actress was going through the sleep-walking scene—a perceptible shiver seemed to pass through everyone, though the acting was totally devoid of the exaggeration I have witnessed in other performances of the part. A tragedian named Paumier was with Helen Faucit then. Many people liked him, but I thought him a great ranter. The rest of the acting was beneath contempt, and great sympathy was felt for Helen Faucit on account of the wretched “support” she received from the company. There were blunders all through the engagement, but the night of “Macbeth” was particularly remarkable. Towards the end of the play, in the scene where Macbeth asks, “How does your patient, doctor?” the poor physician who should have entered at the left came in at the right, whereupon the following occurred :—

MACBETH—(angrily)—Come round here, sir !

DOCTOR—I beg your pardon, sir. (Goes round).

MACBETH—It is impossible that I can act any longer. (Bows and retires).

DOCTOR—(sweeping round the stage and bowing to the audience)—I apologize. (*Exit*).

Again in the last scene, when the great combat was to take place—this, as you know, is the most exciting scene in the play—Macduff entered armed with a beautiful “dress sword,” which was totally out of place beside the “good broad sword” of the murderous Thane. The attempts, moreover, of Macduff to keep the fine edge of the sword from getting hacked made the whole scene ridiculous.

During this engagement Helen Faucit very kindly gave a special benefit for Frank Seymour, to enable him to paint

and otherwise renovate his rather dilapidated theatre. For this benefit the great actress played "Jane Shore" for the first time in Cork, and drew an enormous house. I think Helen Faucit knew very few people in Cork; she appeared a thorough gentlewoman in her style of living, avoiding publicity off the stage as much as it was possible for a famous actress to do so, and shrinking, I always thought, from the "patronage" of the fools and snobs (male and female) who, in the provinces, pester actresses with their condescending attentions. She was most amiable, and I often wondered how she kept her temper in the series of bunglings that used to occur in the Cook Street house. She was greatly tried too by her companies, especially by those who ought to have had more consideration for her. Helen Faucit's last visit to Cork was in '47. I have a vivid recollection of the various splendid performances, because she was accompanied by G. V. Brooke, unquestionably the greatest actor of his time. Having a host of friends in Cork Brooke was very often late at the theatre, unable to tear himself away from pleasant company at the dinner-parties he used to be asked to, or, perhaps, not having been able to get back from a long excursion into the country. He was very unpunctual, and Helen Faucit was quite the contrary. She could not bear to be kept waiting, and the love-making of Romeo and Juliet used sometimes to be preceded by decidedly acrimonious passages between the two great "stars."

I remember well one evening I was in Brooke's dressing-room at the theatre. He was late, and was dressing in a hurry. The only others present were, one of the G——s, and Henry Roche, the hairdresser, who superintended the wigs. Brooke had been off in the country for a day's fishing with the G——s, and had dined with them in the evening. Sandy Seyton, son of the Mrs. Seyton I had told you about so often, came to the door twice: "Mr. Brooke! Mr. Brooke! Miss Faucit's compliments, she's waiting." And Brooke answered impatiently: "Let Miss Faucit go to Jericho and wait!" We, I remember, amiably did our best to get him out in time. "As You Like It" was the name of the play that night, and never before, nor since, did I see such acting.

In 1851 Helen Faucit was married, and there were no sincerer good wishes for her happiness than those breathed

by her host of captives in Cork, even though her marriage robbed them for ever of the delight of her acting. I am an old man now and I have seen all the best actresses of our time, and I would not think of comparing one of them, good though they be, to Helen Faucit, who was head and shoulders over every other actress of her own time.*

I remember on one occasion taking part in a remarkable production in the Cook Street theatre. It was an amateur production of "The White Horse of the Peppers," for the benefit of a local charity. We were only a lot of amateurs, but I am proud to say that our performance was highly applauded, and we were told by those who were no flatterers, that our production was quite fit to take rank with the work of high-class professionals. The bright particular star of the occasion was George F——, whose impersonation of "Gerald Pepper" was inimitable. His acting was really fine, and the general opinion prevailed that the part could not have been better acted. It was a great night. Samuel Lover, who was in Cork on a visit to George F——'s brother-in-law, Joe C——, was present. When Lover was asked to help the good cause, he came on the stage and sang one of his own songs, "The Low-Back Car," in his own inimitable style. He delighted the audience, and he was himself delighted with the acting of George F——, for he declared afterwards it was the best production of the play he had ever seen.

Lover was very suggestive of Tom Moore; he was taller, people said, but I believe he had the same cut of face and figure. My own part in the performance was a very humble one, but there was a circumstance connected with it that causes my recollection to be very vivid. I wore a sort of military costume, which included a pair of big white gloves. As I was living in the barracks I gave these gloves to a man who used to look after everything of the sort for me, to clean, for they wanted touching up a bit. I think he must have pipe-clayed them till he was black in the face. I put them

* The recorder of these recollections is inclined to accept the judgment of the "Old Playgoer," who was a man of great talent and excellent judgment. The writer once in conversation with Mr. Barry Sullivan—no mean judge it will be allowed—happened to mention that he had heard Helen Faucit was a fine actress, though not a beautiful woman. "Helen Faucit!" exclaimed Barry, his eyes gleaming at the recollection, "was a wonderful actress. I thought her when I first caught sight of her a plain woman, but when she spoke I thought her beautiful—her whole soul seemed to beam forth in the varying expression of her face. Why, the present day actresses for the most are nothing to her. I don't think the best of them fit to tie Helen Faucit's shoe-lace."

on rather in a hurry when going on the stage. It so happened that in the course of the afterpiece I had to several times embrace the lady who played a part which ran with mine. To my horror I discovered that in these embraces I left the white mark of hands on her black velvet back, and whenever she turned her back on the audience the people in the front seats tittered. She was not a very amiable person, I remember, and I was dreadfully nervous lest she should discover the way in which I had decorated her, because if she had there would certainly have been an explosion, she looked so ridiculous. But happily everything passed off well, and the performance was voted a great success, the presence of Lover lending decided distinction to the occasion.

I think I often told you how the people at Collins's Pavilion used to vex Frank Seymour by their opposition to the more legitimate home of the drama in Cook Street. Well, they played the poor fellow a dreadful trick on one occasion. Frank had discovered how sweet are some of the uses of "advertisement," and he sometimes startled the public with rather mysterious announcements. One time he had in preparation a melodrama called "The Man with the Carpet Bag," and for weeks this simple announcement in big letters, "The Man with the Carpet Bag is coming, decorated the dead walls of the city. Then, for a while, it was "Look out for the Man with the Carpet Bag," with nothing to indicate what was really meant. But one fine morning the public read the announcement "The Man with the Carpet Bag has arrived, and may be seen at Collins's Pavilion this evening," so that the bright boys at Collins's, by posting their own announcement under the mysterious placard availed of Seymour's weeks of advertising and took the wind out of his sails. That night there was a packed house at "Collins's, and Frank was greatly enraged over the trick they played him. His own "Man with the Carpet Bag" was produced in due time but he hung fire most woefully.

One of the most interesting personages connected with the theatre in the old days was Mary Forrest, an intelligent woman who had acted as dresser to generations of leading ladies. She was full of anecdotes, and many a time she made us laugh over her queer stories. She knew the Keans,

father and son, very well. When first Charles Kean came to Cork, and found Mary Forrest there, he embraced her affectionately as a dear old friend. She was touring the towns of the South with Edmund Kean and his travelling company. It must have been about the time Kean had to leave London, under a cloud. They were in low water enough.

"We often hadn't the rent of the hall we played in," Mary used to tell us, "and I remember well one night Kean came into the hall sometime before the performance, and found the place in half-darkness. 'What's the meaning of this?' said he; 'Light up, light up!' And the answer he got was—'We can't; we're waiting for the people to come into the front seats *to get money for the candles.*' You may say that was running things close enough."

The comic aspect of affairs always struck Mary, and she was very much alive to the ludicrous element in any occurrence, her sense of the humorous being pretty acute. Once on this memorable tour with Edmund Kean, when finances were very low, and some unavoidable debts were pressing, the company decided to leave the town of C—— under cover of the night. The bailiffs came next morning to make a seizure of the effects of the Company. All they could pounce upon was Mary Forrest, and *forty conical paper hats* used in some play in the repertoire of the company; but they put Mary into a cart with the paper hats and bundled her off to the pound. It was the comical nature of the seizure that kept Mary's spirits up under such distressing circumstances as being impounded.

"How little the people in front know what queer things go on behind the scenes," Mary once said to me. "There's Miss Blank (mentioning the name of a famous actress), she came to me the other night to stitch down the heel of her satin shoe, because she has a soft corn on her heel, and the shoe is pressing on it. Didn't you see her limping all through that last act?" It was very unromantic. Fancy Juliet's pathetic passages gaining a keener tone from the pinching pain of a soft corn on her heel! If the public had known it, how disenchanted they'd have been. The only dramatic parallel would be a Desdemona with a chilblain on her nose.

Mary once told me a very amusing story about her own mother. The mother once said reproachfully—"Mary,

you're a long time in that playhouse ablow there, and you never yet took me to see the play." So one night Mary brought her mother to the opera. It was "Sonnambula," and Mary thought her mother would be delighted with the bird-like warblings of Miss Sheriff, then a very popular prima donna. "I put my mother into one of them lattice boxes up there, where she could see without being seen," Mary said, "thinking she'd be delighted with the singing." But Mary's mother was not greatly impressed by the vocal efforts of the popular singer.

"Well, how do you like it, mother?" Mary asked in the middle of the second act.

"'Tis very nice," the old woman answered in a rather dubious tone. Near the end of the opera Mary returned to the charge.

"Well mother, isn't Miss Sheriff grand?"

"Och, lave me alone, I'm dead from her screechin'," exclaimed the old woman in a tone of deep impatience. "*Whin is she comin' out on the rope?*"

The poor old soul was, in her blissful ignorance, not able to draw any distinction between an operatic prima donna and a tight-rope dancer. After that Mary gave her mother up as a bad case, and playfully denounced her as an ignorant old creature upon whom good music was quite thrown away.

It was this same Miss Sheriff who complained of a chorus singer who used to play his part too well. It was in "Sonnambula" he was most annoying. In the scene where "Amina" receives the congratulations of her friends this amorous chorus singer was not content with the traditional embracements, but he must needs steal a real kiss from the pretty prima donna, and a hearty kiss too. "Of course," said Miss Sheriff with charming simplicity, "I don't mind being kissed in the ordinary way of professional business, but that fellow does it with a gusto that quite annoys me. It is disgraceful meanness, and if he does it again I'll slap his face in sight of the audience." But the chorus singer evidently got a hint of what was in store for him, for he ever afterwards displayed less ardour in his congratulations to "Amina."

We used to have some fine performances of opera in Cork, and Sims Reeves was our ideal tenor. We were very fond of "The Waterman," but I doubt if anything

ever touched us like the great tenor's "Edgardo" in "Lucia." I think I heard him at his best when he sang at concerts here, early in 1850. His singing of the "Fra-poco" from "Lucia" was a thing to be for ever remembered. What a wonderful evergreen that great singer is! He came to Cork first in 1845. He was then a very young man, and his voice had been little cultivated. The first place in which Reeves sang in Cork was the Dominican Church of St. Mary's, Pope's Quay. It was on the Sunday before the first week of the opera season. Reeves was tenor in a company brought to Cork by Mr. Alban Croft, choirmaster of the Jesuit Church in Dublin. Croft introduced his tenor to Gillespie, who was at that time choirmaster of St. Mary's, and it was arranged that Reeves should sing in Mozart's Twelfth Mass at St. Mary's. I remember how people spoke of his fine singing of the "Et Incarnatus" and other airs in the great work. Then there was a week of opera. "The Bohemian Girl" and "Lucia" were done that week I think for the first time in Cork. Reeves sang in both.

There was a banquet given to Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator, in Cork at that time, and Reeves was one of the singers. He sang "The Minstrel Boy," and other Irish melodies. What struck people most about his singing then was the way he used bring out grand ringing high chest notes. But it was not till a later visit, towards the close of the year '47, Cork people came to realize what a singer Sims Reeves was. Alban Croft and his wife were very clever, and they appeared to wish to impress the fact on the public. In their placards their own names were "writ large," and the other singers put off with very small type. But on the occasion of this particular visit the keen ears of the then music-loving Corkonians very soon discovered what manner of singer Reeves was, and after the firstnight people began to rave so much about the new tenor, that for very shame the Crofts were obliged to give his name more prominence in the playbills. It was quite wonderful how anyone had the heart to go to concerts or anything else in the way of amusements at that time, for the ghastly presence of a great famine brought almost everything to a hideous standstill. Sad sights were to be seen in the city every day when the poor famine-stricken people used to creep in from

the outlying districts to look for a morsel of food. They were found dead or dying in the doorways of the city every day. The Crofts, with Reeves and other great singers, such as Mario, Grisi and Alboni, were introduced to Cork by Mr. Alex. D. Roche, a clever musician and the composer of some beautiful songs. His son, Mr. Kearns D. Roche, has in his possession a magnificent silver snuff-box, which bears the following inscription:—

Presented

TO

A. D. ROCHE, Esq.,

As a Token of Esteem and Respect,

BY HIS FRIENDS

J. SIMS REEVES,

L. LAVANU AND H. J. WHITWORTH.

DEC., 1849.

Messrs. Lavanu and Whitworth were two prominent members of the company in which Reeves was at that time. Whitworth was a very fine baritone and very popular.

An actor appeared about the same time as Sims Reeves, who has grown very old in his profession—T. C. King. I think he was at his best in the year '55 or '56—and he was very popular in Cork though he did not come then for the first time. His "Othello" was a fine performance. I went to see him when he appeared in Cork once more, a few years ago, a very old man, though still bearing up bravely. Yet, to one who had known the man in his prime, it was a sad sight to see him overborne by years. And, oh dear, his voice was gone to a mere shadow! I was glad to see the old actor, but I left the theatre sadly, feeling that I ought not have come.

Another old Cork favourite, who has been long before the public, and is still in harness, is that rare singer, Durand. Why, he was here with Lucy Escott the soprano, in '56, in opera, and we all loved his singing. He came again in '63 with a company called the British Opera Association, the prima donna being a Madame Tonnelier, whose husband, a Mr. Cooper, was a fine violinist. At that time Durand enjoyed immense popularity. He was a most refined singer, and there were certain baritone parts no one else filled with such grace and dignity, or with such sweetness and power of

voice. I remember well the row that took place in the theatre one night of the '63 visit, when a baritone named Tempest, appeared in a part Durand had been announced for. I think the opera was "*Sonnambula*," an opera in which Durand always made a great hit. Well, if there was a Tempest on the stage that night, there was a hurricane in the pit, and a regular tornado in the gallery. The fellows hooted and howled, and so great was the excitement that Madame Tonnelier became quite ill, and it took a long time to pacify the house with explanations that Mr. Durand had not arrived in Cork in time, or some excuse of the kind.

The best period of burlesque I can remember was when Robson came here in 1862. Frank Robson was a rare genius, as eccentric as he was gifted. His "*Medea*" was an incomparably fine piece of burlesque. He played "*Sampson Burr*" in the "*Porter's Knot*," but I think his "*Daddy Hardacre*" was one of the finest specimens of the actor's art I ever witnessed. The man had a vein for tragic acting that gave him extraordinary power over the audience—in fact at times he held them as if spellbound. He was a rare genius.

Yet though we have had so many great actors in Cork from time to time, it must be confessed that a theatre in Cork has never been a paying concern. It seems to me that this has been so always, for some time ago I came across an old Cork paper—printed, I think, in 1820—in which I read a very bitter complaint of the inadequate support given to the local theatre, and it stated that a fine company of opera singers brought down by the manager of the Hawkins Street theatre in Dublin were playing to almost empty benches. Every manager since has had, it appears to me, the same thing to contend against. Seymour was an excellent manager, and, in spite of the queer devices he sometimes had to resort to in order to make ends meet, he was most popular, and was liked by everyone who knew him, and if the people would have gone to the theatre for anyone they would have gone for him. Yet he had to make frequent appeals to the public to give proper support to the theatre.

I heard Barry Sullivan once reproach the public of Cork for not giving him proper support, even though he was, in a

sense, a native of the city.* Macready, on the occasion of his last visit to Cork—it was in 1850, just before his retirement—opened to a very poor house, though he was the original “Richelieu” and the original “Virginius,” and played them as no one else ever played them. I heard him, when leaving, make the remark, rather bitterly, that a man should come to Cork three years running before the people would give him a proper welcome. I remember, in ’63, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews came here with their St. James’s Company. They played “The Merry Widow,” “The Dark Cloud,” “Bristol Diamonds,” “Under the Rose,” and other admirable pieces; but the houses were very bad. In that engagement they did what has been done very often since—they got down a military band from the barracks, to try to get the people to come to the theatre. A military band is a good draw usually, but it sometimes falls flat enough. At that time the Cork gallery was at its worst. It was in the old George’s Street theatre, now the Post Office, so many years under the management of genial “Dick” Burke. Nothing could be more outrageous than the usual behaviour of the gallery fellows then, and for some years before; and it required all the strength of a public movement to put an end to the scandal. Why, there were people in the city who dared not go into the theatre, for fear of insults being heaped on them by persons in the gallery. The gallery, being very far back, had full view of all the better portions of the house; and any lady or gentleman, no matter how exalted in rank, who went into the theatre, was liable to be made the object of attack. Language of the most insulting kind, containing allusions to people’s private and domestic affairs, was indulged in. This sort of thing was supposed to be witty; but it was as devoid of humour as it was of decency. The management did their best to contend against this evil; but, of course, they were not able to do much. It was a social pillory few persons had the

* Windele, in his “South of Ireland,” says:—“Theatricals are not really much valued or encouraged in Cork, notwithstanding that its inhabitants lay claim to high discernment and taste in dramatic matters. The opening of the Mary Street circus has tested these pretensions, and it is now ascertained that a dramatic company of general merit, led by one or two first-rate performers, must play to empty benches if the circus happens to be open. Whilst the latter was overflowing with crowded citizens, admiring the feats of horses and their riders, or the buffoonery of party-coloured clowns, the former was cold and deserted.” Though this was written over forty years ago, it holds good to this very day. As a matter of fact, there are not, in a population of ninety thousand, two thousand regular playgoers in Cork.

courage to face. If a well-to-do grocer happened to come in, he was immediately questioned as to "how much sand he put in his sugar"; if a chandler, he was shouted at for the "price of fat," and so on. And if there happened to be any little legend concerning the sufferer's family, which he had no burning desire to hear related in public, it was certain to be raked up, and the audience regaled with it. This evil grew to such monstrous proportions that prominent citizens made up their minds for a determined effort to put an end to it, and happily they succeeded. I remember well what valuable aid John Francis Maguire gave to this reform. In his paper, the *Examiner*, he published many appeals to the public to aid in putting down a scandalous nuisance, and as mayor of the city he had many opportunities for assisting the movement towards better order of Cork's sole theatre.

I remember a case in which at that time a "gentleman" was summoned by Dick Burke for smoking in the gallery, and for having refused to put out his pipe when told to do so. Maguire, as mayor, was presiding at the police court when the case came on, and didn't he read the fellow a lecture! He said that the conduct of persons like defendant was driving every respectable person out of the theatre, that he had been in theatres in the principal cities in Europe, and he never saw anything at all approaching the misconduct of the Cork gallery. The place was, he said, being turned into a common tap-room. It was unfortunate for the defendant that he was brought before the mayor, for Maguire was an uncompromising foe to tobacco, and he dilated at length on the evils of "such a practice in such a place." But, like the large-hearted, liberal-minded man he was, he let the poor defendant off with a caution, after delivering a lecture that did good, not merely to the defendant, but to every other ill-conducted habitué of the gallery. Yet most actors seemed to enjoy their visit to Cork. Compton, the celebrated comedian, father of the talented gentleman who has done so much for the revival of old English comedy, writing to a Cork friend in January, 1858, said of Cork:—"I assure you I have a very agreeable recollection of my visit there, and the choice spirits I met—I don't mean the whiskey, but the half dozen monstrous pleasant fellows who conducted me with due solemnity to the Blarney stone, not that I have since profited much by its influence."

Thalberg, the famous pianist, was a great favourite in Cork. He gave his farewell concerts in '63, which was for us a rather memorable theatrical year. As well as my memory serves me, Thalberg was very fond of playing bits of Mendelssohn, and was rather modest about his own productions, brilliant though they were. It was on the occasion of one of Thalberg's earlier visits that a very singular scene was enacted in Cork. Thalberg had been announced with a great flourish, and people were very anxious to hear him, and it was anticipated that there would be a great crowd. But, unfortunately, some previous experience in Cork or elsewhere led the gifted foreigner to entertain doubts about his share of the receipts, so he sent word from his hotel to the needy *impresario* that he would not play unless he got the money down. This came like a thunderbolt. Where on earth could he beg, borrow, or steal the sum Thalberg asked?—and even if he did, how could he be certain the house would repay it? There were anxious brows for a time, but at length the deep gloom of painful cogitation was lightened by a brilliant idea.

"Let him stop in his hotel," said a friendly genius, "and we'll do without him."

And then two or three knowing boys put their heads together. Night came, and with it a bumper house to welcome the great Thalberg. The famous pianist shuffled out to the piano in a rather curious way, some thought, and sat at the piano with his back to the audience. "Thalberg is rather changed since the last time he was here," some persons remarked; "he does not seem quite the same." And when the great Thalberg began to play, a few competent to form an opinion on the subject thought he had gone off in his playing as well as in his appearance. Still it was so beautiful! so delightful! But in the midst of these raptures there was a whisper in the gallery—a whisper soft as the summer wind through the trees—"Billy Barry! 'Tis Billy Barry!" The pianist kept on playing, but not so coherently as before. The whisper grew into a cry, then a shout, then a roar—"Tis Billy Barry! Don't I know that piece! Get out, you impostor! Give us back our money!" &c. Then the whole house took up the cry. The gallery boys began to pelt things. The pianist kept on never minding, and played away as if for the dear life. A scene of wild clamour arose, and

just as the pianist was well into a glorious impromptu a well-directed Brazil nut caught him a stinger about the ear. Then "Thalberg" sprang from the piano, and facing the audience in a white heat of passion used language "wholly unfit for publication" (as the newspapers say), and in the very broadest brogue. Then he fled, and the whole performance ended in a scene of wild disorder. Next day the secret was out. Failing to get Thalberg, the poor manager had been induced to permit his friend Billy Barry to despoil himself of a luxuriant beard and to fix himself up to look as like Thalberg as possible, and it must be said his make-up was exceedingly clever. He was a fine pianist too, but there were so many of his "chums" in the house that he could scarcely have escaped recognition. It was a daring attempt to gull the public, and I think it deserved more success than attended it.

But don't think all the queer things were in the older theatres. I remember in the George's Street theatre, in Dick Burke's time, a certain bailiff had pressing business with a tenor named Hague, who was then singing in an English opera. This bailiff thought it would be a particularly smart thing to arrest the singer while on the stage. He had made several attempts to find him in other places, so one night he made his way into the theatre. He did not know Hague's appearance, but he knew he was singing a principal part, and he trusted his fortune to take up the right man. When the tenor's friends heard that the bailiff was at the wings looking for "Thaddeus" (it was the Bohemian Girl that night), they gave the word to the carpenter to loosen all the trap-doors on the stage, at the same time warning the singer.

"Is there one Hague here?" asked the bailiff, slipping up to a man standing at one of the wings.

"Oh, yes, there he is just there," said the person interrogated, scarcely able to repress a chuckle.

Hague was standing quite near, not knowing what had taken place. The bailiff took a step forward to lay hands on him, but the moment he did so he went down through a trap-door and was nearly stifled in a huge tank that was under the stage, which caused some who were present and enjoyed the bailiff's discomfiture to quote the very antique piece of proverbial obviousness, "There's many a slip," etc.

I told you Macready got a rather shabby reception in Cork. I never could account for it myself, because he was one of the best living exponents of Shakespeare's greatest characters, and in some other characters, notably in those fine plays by that gifted Irishman Sheridan Knowles, he excelled every-one else on the stage. Macready was rather sour about the thin house that welcomed him on the first night of the engagement, and though the people crowded the house on the other nights I don't think the great actor quite forgave them. They ought, it was said, have been all the more anxious to welcome him on account of his American experiences the year before, when the jealousy of Forrest, an American actor, nearly led to the English tragedian being killed. So it was said. But there was another version of the story about Forrest and Macready. When Edwin Forrest came to Cork, in the spring of 1846, he told us that Macready had behaved very badly towards him in London; that he had through sheer jealousy got up a *claque* against him, and had made things in general rather unpleasant for his American rival. It is but right to state also that G. V. Brooke complained that he also had suffered in a similar fashion at the hands of Macready and his *claque*. Brooke and Forrest were very good friends, and the warmest welcome Brooke got in America was from the great American tragedian. Forrest was a fine actor. I never saw a better "Hamlet" than his.

Macready's visit to Cork was not a financial success, but quite the reverse. It was in the autumn of 1850 he came to Cork. He was then close to sixty years old, and in the fulness of his powers, for, what was lacking of the fire and energy of his earlier days was more than compensated for by mature intellectual strength. To my mind, an actor is never so good as when time has robbed him of some of the "robustious" strength of his youth and given him instead the intellectual perfection, the perfect artistic finish of every detail in his portraiture, that can only come with years. Macready was a stately actor, a most truly admirable representative of those heroes in which the classic drama abounds. His "Macbeth" was a great Shakesperian study, scholarly, grand, and at the same time full of the spirit that made you realize, with painful plainness, some of the horrors of the character as conceived by the master-mind of Shakes-

peare. But fine as was Macready's acting in Macbeth and other Shakesperian characters, it was not till you saw him in "Richelieu" and "Virginius" that you could form a real estimate of his powers. He was, you are aware, the first "Richelieu," and he kept possession of the character. His playing of the part has become traditional, but closely as the traditions have been preserved by very gifted actors since then, none of them can be said to have identified himself with the part in anything like the way Macready did. An old actor who had played for some years with Macready told me, a few years ago, that on the nights Macready played "Richelieu," from the time he came into the theatre in the evening—sometimes early in the evening—until the curtain fell on the last scene of Lytton's drama, the great actor never lost sight of the character for a single minute, but simply "wrapt himself up in it," and was the aged cardinal all the time. I don't always implicitly believe old actors when they tell me a story. Old actors are mostly like old sailors rather given to "sea serpents," or like old soldiers prolific in descriptions of stirring military events which never took place, but from what I saw of Macready's "Richelieu" I can quite believe that his grasp of the character was extraordinary. The last night of Macready's visit he played "Virginius," a character which suited him perfectly. The audience were deeply impressed, and at the fall of the curtain when the actor was recalled, the whole house rose at him and cheered lustily. It was a genuine hearty farewell.

Cork has always been fond of music, and has always, within my memory, given distinguished lyric artistes as hearty a welcome as they could get anywhere else. I remember when that sweet Irish singer, Catherine Hayes, came to Cork—it was in 1850 too—she got a royal reception in the theatre. She came to Cork just previous to going to Rome, where she had an engagement to sing in an Italian opera. The first night was the inevitable "Sonnambula." The house was crowded to excess, and the singer's entrance was greeted with applause which amounted to an ovation. Catherine Hayes, I remember, was of slight figure, but her features were most graceful, and she had an appearance of refinement not often remarkable in a public singer. She sang also in "Lucretia Borgia," "Don Pasquale," and some other operas. "Lucia" was, if my memory serves me, one

of her best parts. There was a very fine tenor singing with her, a Spaniard named Bordas, and amongst the violinists was Levy of Dublin, who is still playing. During those opera times our pit was always '3s., and our gallery 1s. 6d. Catherine Hayes afterwards made, I believe, a very great hit in Rome. There was rather an outcry then in Rome against foreigners invading Italian opera in its very home, and on Catherine Hayes's appearance she was greeted with marks of disfavour which had already been extended to two or three other English singers, but our Irish nightingale bravely faced the ordeal, and before many minutes had passed the popular clamour ceased, and by the close of the opera she had sung herself securely into the favour of the audience. I don't wonder at the change, for she had a glorious voice, rich and ringing, and capable of all sorts of work.

The year 1850 marked a complete change in the government of the Cook Street house. The managerial reins were taken up by a man named Joy, and on Easter Monday of that year a benefit was announced for the late manager, Frank Seymour. In this performance, which was an amateur representation of some scenes from various plays of Shakespeare, Mrs. Seyton again appeared in her favourite part, "The Queen," in "Hamlet." There were later benefits for Seymour. There was one in '52 in the old theatre in Mary Street, and Seymour himself appeared as "Terry O'Rourke." The last "legitimate" performance I remember in the Cook Street house was in 1859, when Barry Sullivan took a benefit in "King Lear." There was about £15 in the house. The people did not flock to see Barry then as they did when he reached the height of his fame.

The first appearance of Mario and Grisi in Cork was in the August of '52. It was after the close of the National Exhibition, which was held in Cork in 1852. There were two concerts held in the exhibition buildings, and all Cork crowded in to hear the greatest tenor and the greatest soprano of the age. Such singing!—the building shook with the thunders of applause which followed the deep hush which fell upon the people while the great singers charmed their senses with sweet sounds. I shall never forget Mario's singing of the "Tutto è Sciolto," and the "Come Gentil." Mario was the handsomest man I ever saw, and he had such a voice as we dream the angels have. And Grisi captivated

everyone with her matchless delivery of the "Qui la Voce" from "Puritani," and her superb rendering of the "Come è bello" from "Lucretia." There were other singers of the party, including Signor F. Lablache, and the basso, Susini, who came to Cork again only a few years ago. That was the first time I heard Mario and Grisi, and I wish it had been the last. They came again. It must have been nearly twenty years later. Ah, what a sad case they were! I think a Cork newspaper remarked of Grisi, that the great art was there but the voice was gone. I gladly draw a veil over the performances of these once great singers. They tried, I think to "drown dull care" in the ordinary way, but it didn't improve their singing, rather the reverse. They were put up at the Victoria Hotel (then in the hands of a Mr. McCormack) in rooms fit for a king and queen. It was very pleasant, but when the bill came in they refused to pay it, and said it was extortion. There was a hot altercation. It was explained that the proprietor had gone to great expense to fit up the rooms. In the list of expenses for decoration, gasfitting was a heavy item. But Grisi explained that she did not want an elaborate cut-glass chandelier in her bedroom, she slept no better for it, and didn't think it at all necessary for her comfort. The singers said they were quite prepared to pay reasonable expenses, but no more. The dispute went on. Some of the company were stopping at the "Commercial," so the disputants sent to their friends for Mrs. Stephens' bill. That was pronounced reasonable, and in the end a happy medium was struck, and the matter ended.

Those latter-day experiences were, I fear, very bitter for Mario and Grisi. What a sad thing it must have been for those two who had so long held sway as the King and Queen of song, petted by the mightiest monarchs in the world, the spoiled children of the public, the favoured ones of society, the fashion in music all over the world, to find themselves in the autumn of their lives with cracked voices and broken fortunes, and the crown of the world's fame falling from their old heads! It is well for the poet to say:—

"Alas! for those who never sing,
But die with all their music in them!"

Yet, as it is better the thoughts that rise in some, which would give no new pleasure to the world, and in their sad-

ness might strike an echoing chord of pain in some desolate heart, should remain unuttered, so lifelong muteness were blessedness indeed compared with what those must feel who in their golden youth sing like seraphs, and in their old age treat the public to what is very pitiful to hear. I wonder will singers ever know the proper time to retire from public life? But then we must not blame them, because, poor things, they very often have nothing to retire on, and then it is hard to be cold to them, even though their poor old worn-out voices may be suggestive of Pan's pipes, or the unpleasant sharps which proceed from the common tin-whistle.

I remember a rather amusing thing that occurred here when Madame Rudersdorf came to sing in opera. This lady was taught a lesson in manners that did her a great deal of good. She came to Cork, no doubt, with her nose in the air, and full of all the graces of a great lady. When my old friend Dick Burke went to the Imperial Hotel to talk to her about business, he approached her, of course, in his usual affable, jovial way, treating her as he had been accustomed to treat ladies who were far above her. But Madame had evidently expected him to enter with a salâm, or pull his forelock, or some such ceremony of submission, for when he approached she haughtily waved him away. When he stood amazed at this extraordinary reception from this lady who expected to "go shares" with him in the receipts of the week, Madame explained in most top-loftical tones and terms, that she was a very superior person, of exalted rank in her own country, and that she invariably required all managers with whom she had any business transactions, never to forget that they were "only managers," in other words that they should be fully impressed by her great condescension in having any dealings whatever with them. There would have been a good deal more of this sort of thing, but our old friend indignantly cut her short, and telling her in a few blunt words that if she didn't choose to behave as every other lady behaved who came to his theatre, she might get someone else to transact the business with, he left her "alone in her glory." This superior person was afterwards very glad to climb down from her perch of grandeur, and discuss £ s. d. like any rational human being.

In connection with the visit of Madame Rudersdorf,

I may mention an affair that afforded us some amusement at the time. There was a fellow in Cork then who was very much in love with his own voice. It wasn't much of a voice, a poor little pipe, more like the squeak of a very large doll than anything else. Poor S—— got stage-struck, and when Madame Rudersdorf came to Cork he offered her a considerable sum of money to give him one chance in opera, with the stipulation that if he succeeded in the trial he should be taken on in the company. Madame had her own opinion about the "coming tenor," but she thought the trial would cure him. So she pocketed the fee and gave the little tenor the part of "Edgardo" in *Lucia*. The Cork "boys" got word of this arrangement, and they mustered in great force, especially in the gallery, with the fell purpose of ironical applause. So far did they succeed in their mock enthusiasm that the unfortunate tenor was encored and re-encored no less than *eighteen times* during the course of the opera! When the curtain fell the poor little wretch had not a note left, had, in fact, no more voice than an ordinary crow. But he failed to see the joke of the whole thing, and next day he waited on Madame at the Imperial Hotel, with a view to an engagement. Madame shook her head. "My dear sir, you will not do," she said, "your voice is no good."

"My voice no good!" exclaimed the little tenor, now bursting with proud indignation, "Why, I was encored eighteen times—just think of it, eighteen times!"

"Ah! my dear sir," said Madame with a sweet pitying smile, "You do not know the Cork boys, *they were only humbugging you!*"

Randegger, who was conductor of the opera company, was at the piano, going over some piece of music. He turned around to make some remark endorsing Madame's opinion of the tenor's voice.

"Look here now, you fellow," shouted the irate candidate for operatic honours, shaking his fist at the conductor, "I don't mind what this lady says, but if you give me any cheek I'll break your head."

He would have done it, because he was the son of a prize-fighter, and himself a pugilist of some repute. Randegger wisely held his tongue, and Madame rang for a waiter to "shew the gentleman out."

We were always fond of a circus in Cork, and I remember in the old days how well Batty's used to do in Mary Street. Ginnett, a very great favourite, used also to do a fine business, and Pablo Fanque's circus, on the site of the present Post Office, was most popular in its day.

I have often told you how well I remember Charles Kean. He was a great favourite in Cork. It is rather a remarkable fact that when he married Ellen Tree in Dublin, in 1842, the first play they appeared in after coming on to Cork was that beautiful old play "The Honeymoon," a play in which some of our greatest actors and actresses have made a name, but seldom produced now except by "old comedy" companies. Charles Kean was a great actor. He hadn't, it was said by those who knew both men, a tithe of his father's ability (Edmund Kean was a genius, and his son wasn't), and he had natural physical defects; yet he was a great actor. What bountiful Nature does for some actors, Art did for him. He had a naturally bad voice. There was a slightly nasal sound in it. For instance, he pronounced his wife's name "Elled Kead," but so great was the skill he exercised in the use of his voice, that its natural defects were unnoticed. In the ordinary way he was remarkable for the perfect distinctness of his enunciation. In one sense he was the most artistic actor I ever saw, he made so much of every opportunity. His conception of every character he played was very fine, but to my mind the thing most to be admired was the marvellous skill he displayed in working out the details of his dramatic picture, even to the most minute particulars. When Kean and his wife came here in the summer of 1850, they played "Strathmore" for the first time in Cork, and in this play Mrs. Kean as "Catherine" was superb. In the play of "The Wife's Secret," written for them, they were grand. "Sir Walter Amyot" in this play was one of Kean's best characters. But I am quite sure it was in "Louis XI." he was at his best. It was in every sense a most perfect picture. I saw Charles Kean in London play "The Corsican Brothers" (it was the first production of that play in English). I saw him play "Count Horace de Beuzeval" in "Pauline" and other parts played first by the great French actor Fecther; I saw Fecther in the same parts, and so far as it was possible to institute a comparison between them, I thought Kean vastly

superior. He also played in the "Courier of Lyons," "Faust and Marguerite," and made a great success of all. I liked none of them as well as "Louis XI." In this play the actor's art was displayed in such perfection that one became absorbed in the story, the evil personality of the bloodthirsty old king, whose jumble of religion and murder was a strange, wild blasphemy, fascinated the spectator and stamped the centre-figure deeply on the memory. Kean's last scene in that play was one of the most realistic pieces of acting I ever witnessed. In one sense Kean was the Irving of his time, for so particular was he about the stage arrangements that the least thing out of place on the stage—a chair in the wrong place even—would vex him.

A total contrast to Charles Kean was another great actor of my acquaintance—Gustavus V. Brooke. There is no name that stirs in me such mingled feelings of pleasure and of pain as the name of that great and gifted, but most unfortunate man.

I have always considered that the saying "*Poeta nascitur non fit*" applied with equal force to actors. There are "made" actors of course, but like the "made" poets they are not much use. And if ever there was a born actor G. V. Brooke was one. In this respect he was a great contrast to some other actors of his time, notably Charles Kean. In all the parts he played Charles Kean was more or less stereotyped, because when you saw him once in any character you always knew his line of action in it afterwards to a very nicety. Not so with Brooke, for though a master of the dramatic art, he was too full of the spontaneous feeling, and the spirit that breathes only in the true genius, to be bound down by hard and fast rules that make so many actors mechanical and tiresome. There was something in his acting that played upon your feelings, either to make you cry or laugh, with a power quite irresistible. Brooke made his first appearance in Cork in the summer of '42. He was very little known in Cork. By some curious mistake he was announced in the papers as "Mr. Brock." I think an actor named Henderson came with him at that time. The engagement opened with "The Honeymoon." Leading parts were played by a Miss Duret and also by a very clever actress, Mrs. Warner (Miss Huddart), mother of Mr. Charles Warner, afterwards well known on the London boards.

Miss Duret's "Juliet" was a fine performance. During that engagement they played "The Wonder," "All in the Country," "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Black-eyed Susan." The local press then spoke of Brooke as "a decided acquisition." He was full of promise, and though, like all young actors, he had his faults (what actor ever had not ?) it could easily be seen he was destined to have a great career. In Dublin they had received him well. He was, I believe, a native of Dublin. In Cork he met with an equally cordial reception, and he drew well at the Cook Street house. The engagement was a great success. Brooke next came to us in '47, on the occasion of Helen Faucit's last visit to Cork. It was at the end of December in that year, and the engagement opened three days after Christmas. The first night was "Roméo and Juliet," then "Lady of Lyons," "Isabella," "As You Like It," "The Hunchback," and "The Patrician's Daughter," in which Brooke played "Mordaunt," and Helen Faucit "Lady Mabel Lynterne." I have often told you how much Helen Faucit's patience was tried through Brooke's unpunctuality. One day when Brooke came into the theatre entirely late for rehearsal, the great actress gave him some wholesome advice about his want of punctuality. She had played, she said, with the greatest actor on the stage, Mr. Macready, and *he* had never behaved with such want of consideration. She was angry, and it is not to be wondered at, but Brooke answered somewhat sharply, "Madam, G. V. Brooke has not yet had his day." His words were prophetic. Even then people saw a great improvement in his acting. He had lost the dangerous tendency to rant which was observable in his earlier efforts ; he was beginning to use all more gently, and to acquire and beget the temperance recommended by *Hamlet* as giving smoothness to the very heat and tempest of passion. Nothing but the acting of Helen Faucit and Brooke ever reconciled me to the "Lady of Lyons," I always considered that play (with the exception of a few fine passages, such as "Pauline, by pride angels have fallen," etc., and a few others), such a very false and artificial production, and so unworthy of the great hand that wrote it. However, that was a memorable engagement. We were all sorry they didn't play "Hamlet," because even when Brooke came in '42 it was admitted that we had never seen such a "Hamlet."

Nature had been very bountiful to Brooke. He was the noblest figure I ever saw on the stage, and I think I may honestly say—

“Take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.”

When Brooke took the stage he seemed, by his magnificent physique, to dwarf everyone else in the scene. He was verily the “glass of fashion, and the mould of form” amongst actors. To see him in classic garb, one might fancy that some Greek statue had stepped from its pedestal. He had large expressive eyes, a voice rich and musical in the highest degree, a graceful carriage, and his gestures were always free, open, and graceful.

When Brooke visited us in the August of '53, he was in the height of his fame. He received a great ovation, and it seemed as if all Cork wanted to get into the theatre to welcome the popular actor.* The engagement opened with “Othello,” next night “The Hunchback,” then “Hamlet,” and then “Richelieu.” It was on the Friday Brooke took his benefit, appearing as “Sir Giles Overreach,” in “New Way to Pay Old Debts.” What a throng there was that night? How we crowded in to see our favourite actor—

“Eager to catch the music of his breath,”

and to enjoy once more the great dramatic picture he presented in his matchless representation of the chief personage in Massinger's masterpiece. The heat of the theatre was intense, but no one murmured, for everyone present, had, I am sure, a sort of feeling that they were witnessing one of the greatest dramatic performances they were ever privileged to be present at. On the fall of the curtain there was a loud call for Brooke. When he came out he was cheered to the echo. He came forward to the lights and spoke. See, here is the speech in the old book, clipped from a newspaper at the time. He said—“Fatigued as you see I now am, I cannot forego the opportunity of endeavouring to express to you the great gratitude I feel in responding to your most warm and enthusiastic call, and more so as it has emanated from an audience which twelve or thirteen years ago encouraged and fostered the talent they thought I possessed (cheers). Since I last had the pleasure of visiting this city I am happy

* Mr. R. C. Burke's reconstructed theatre was opened on 8th June that year. Mr. Poole was manager.

“to say that my star has been in the ascendant (cheers). I have just returned from America, where I met not only with success but with the greatest degree of courtesy, kindness, and hospitality from our brethren across the Atlantic; and it is my intention in the course of a few months to leave Europe again for some years for the purpose of exercising my professional abilities in a far distant country (cries of ‘success attend you.’) I am sure that I carry with me your good wishes for my success (cheers, and cries of ‘you have always had them’) and wherever I may be the recollection of your kindness shall never be forgotten (cries of ‘we never will forget you,’ and applause). And now, ladies and gentlemen, in endeavouring to express my gratitude for past favours, and for the compliment you have conferred on me by your presence here this evening, allow me in return, sincerely to wish that increasing prosperity may attend the commercial interests of the city of Cork, and at the same time allow me to wish that happiness may reign uninterrupted among you (applause). Ladies and gentlemen, I am due at Belfast on Monday night, but owing to the solicitation of a great number of admirers and friends I have been induced to appear here again on to-morrow evening (cheers, and ‘you are welcome,’) which night shall be set apart for the benefit of the worthy manager, Mr. Poole (cheers). Now, ladies and gentlemen, I will not say, as I anticipated, farewell, but I most respectfully wish you good-night.”

Brooke then retired amid demonstrations of enthusiasm similar to those which greeted his entrance. In a moment, however, he returned and said—“Ladies and gentlemen, in the fulness of my heart, I find I have been guilty of absence of mind for which I beg sincerely to apologize.” He then took up the laurel wreath which had been thrown on the stage, and retired amid a storm of cheering.

It was Mrs. Poole, wife of the manager, who played leading parts with Brooke during that engagement. There was, of course, a crowded house next evening for Poole’s benefit. When the curtain fell, Brooke again came forward and addressed the audience. He said—“Ladies and gentlemen, as this is the last evening I shall have the pleasure of appearing before you for a lengthened period, I can only reiterate my deep sense of gratitude for the favour you have always conferred on my efforts. I shall now say farewell, but I

"hope not for ever (cries of 'no, no'), for I shall indeed carry with me the hope that after the expiration of some years, I shall again have the pleasure of appearing before my kind patrons in Cork (cheers). Till that time arrives, allow me, ladies and gentlemen, wishing you every happiness and prosperity, to say, with the utmost reluctance, but with the most profound respect, farewell!"

Brooke, who appeared deeply moved while speaking this farewell, then retired amid applause, renewed again and again. I didn't wonder at Brooke's emotion on this occasion, because he had a host of personal friends in Cork, and it must have been a source of real pain for him to part from them. He was very often at the G——s. I met him at dinner there often. In private life Brooke was a man of delightful manner, frank and hearty. He always gave me the idea of a man who thoroughly enjoyed his professional success. I remember one night at G——'s, someone asked him to recite, and he very gracefully complied. Someone asked him to give "Othello's defence," and he did so, in his own grand style. Later he gave us "Lord Ullin's Daughter." In those days we had not the extensive selection that reciters have now, when almost every week sees a score of new pieces brought forward to claim public favour. It is needless to say we were all delighted with Brooke's recitation of the lachrymose lay of the lover and the lady, who went under the "waters wild." I can never forget the infinite pathos he infused into the line, "My daughter, oh my daughter!"

But that engagement was not the last time we were destined to see Brooke in '53. He paid a return visit about the Christmas of the same year, and he was received with enthusiasm. I am glad to tell you of a very characteristic act of generosity Brooke performed at that time. It was a very bad winter, and there was a great deal of distress in the city. One morning the mayor (John Francis Maguire, M.P.), received a note:—

"Imperial Hotel,
December 30th.

"Mr. G. V. Brooke presents his compliments to his Worship the Mayor, and begs to enclose £5 to be distributed as he may think best, towards alleviating the wants of the distressed.

"To J. F. MAGUIRE, Esq., M.P.,
"Mayor of Cork."

The good mayor was very zealous for the poor, and you may be sure he did not think lightly of a subscription coming from such an unexpected source. Brooke played "Giles Overreach" for his benefit. His acting in this part was magnificent. In the last scene where "Sir Giles" throws himself upon those who are around him, Brooke's acting was so realistic that many people found themselves oppressed with a sense of pain in witnessing it, just as at present many sensitive people find Mr. Irving's great impersonation "Mathias" in "The Bells" almost too much for them. Such a feeling is, of course, a great tribute to any actor. Well, the Cork people were so pleased with Brooke at that time that he received through the Corporation, as representing the citizens, a requisition couched in the most flattering terms, requesting him to return to Cork after his visit to Limerick, and give the citizens another opportunity of enjoying his splendid acting. Brooke arranged to return from Limerick, where he was due on January 2nd. He did return, and on the 7th January he gave a complimentary benefit for Dick Burke, who was then *lessee* of the theatre. There was an immense audience, and on the conclusion of the performance of "Richelieu" Brooke was recalled. There was a shower of bouquets from all parts of the house, and an elaborately-constructed laurel crown was also presented. Brooke made a short speech, in which he referred to the flattering compliment paid him by the citizens, and he said he should be proud to inform his wife,* the partner of his cares and his hopes, who was prevented by illness from witnessing it, of a triumph which should be remembered by him while memory held her seat. At the mention of his wife's name Brooke displayed deep emotion. He referred with gratification to his continued successes in his own country, and spoke of his affection for a city in which his early and young professional efforts had been fostered. Then he retired amid great cheering.

At that time Brooke had not long returned from America. If you look in Halliwell's edition of Shakespeare, you will find as a frontispiece to one of the volumes a picture of a very beautiful silver service presented to Brooke at the other side of the Atlantic by his numerous friends. In one of these volumes you may see also, as a frontispiece, a fine

* Miss Ivonia Jones.

portrait of Brooke. There is, you will observe, a coin—a small one—pendant to his watch chain. Well, I have a little story to tell you about that coin. It is an American dollar piece, and the date is 1849. Some time after Brooke's 1853 visit to Cork—I think it was in '56—Dick Burke sent him as a *souvenir* a dagger which had been the property of Edmund Kean, and afterwards of his son, Charles Kean. It was a relic such a man as Brooke would appreciate. Now, I dare say, you are aware of the quaint old idea that anything sharp, such as a dagger, knife, scissors, etc., will cut friendship, unless money of some description passes in exchange. Brooke, when he received the dagger, laughingly took the coin off his chain, where it had been since '53, and posted it to his old friend. He wrote also a short letter, in which he spoke of this dollar as "the coin of the country where every man, whether English or Irish, receives the best reward for his labour." That coin is still treasured by the owner as a memento of his great and gifted friend. It is framed in a light gold ring, bearing the inscription—"G. V. Brooke to R. C. Burke."

There is a story of something that occurred between Brooke and Frank Seymour on the occasion of one of Brooke's earlier visits, which is well worth relating. Frank Seymour owed Brooke a good deal of money on account of the various engagements of the actor. Owing to some "chaff" from his friends, Brooke said one day—"Well, I really must get some money from Frank; it is too bad my services should be going for nothing." A few days afterwards he spoke to Frank, half in joke, and said it was quite time he paid him something. "My Dear Gusty, you shall have a cheque for ten pounds." Whereupon he gave the tragedian a cheque on one of the banks—the National—for £10. Brooke did not know where the bank was, and he asked a friend to show him, and together they went to cash the cheque. The clerk to whom the cheque was presented looked at it meditatively and smiled.

"What is the matter?" Brooke asked, "Isn't that cheque all right?"

"Oh, yes, the cheque is all right," replied the clerk, "but unfortunately there is no money to meet it—the gentleman has no funds in the bank at present!"

Without a word Brooke left the bank. He was very

indignant. That evening he met Frank and spoke his mind pretty plainly.

"It is too bad," he said, "that you should serve me so about that cheque."

"But wasn't the cheque a good one, Gusty?" Frank said.

"The cheque was good," Brooke replied, "but what was the use of that when they wouldn't cash it?"

"What, not cash my cheque!" the other exclaimed indignantly. "Who was he?—was he a low-sized stout man with a black moustache?"

"I didn't notice," said Brooke, "but he wouldn't cash it anyway."

"Well, now," said Frank, impressively, "you present that cheque on Monday, and if they refuse, you show me the man that refuses, and I'll have him dismissed the bank."

That was on Saturday. On Monday following Brooke and his friend went again to the bank, and when the cheque was presented, the clerk proceeded to cash it. But he was laughing softly to himself all the while.

"Why do you laugh," Brooke said. "What is it that amuses you?"

"I can't help laughing," said the clerk. "*This money hasn't been more than a few minutes in the bank!*"

And at that Brooke and his friend laughed too.

But Brooke thought a great deal of Seymour, and when that worthy man shuffled off this mortal coil, no one amongst all his many friends more sincerely or deeply regretted him than did Gustavus Brooke. Indeed, everyone who knew Frank had a great regard for him. They knew that it was only when he really could not help it that he failed to fulfil his financial obligations. Everyone knew, too, that he was a very generous, good-natured man, and that his free-hearted, hospitable disposition most frequently accounted for the financial quicksands he occasionally found himself in.

I have told you a good deal about the financial pinches Frank Seymour suffered so often. It is right, therefore, that I should tell you that all these things dated from a great loss he suffered in Glasgow. He had a fine theatre in that city and was in very good circumstances; in fact, he was so well off that he kept a carriage. It happened that Sheridan Knowles, who was actor as well as play-writer, came to fulfil an engagement at Seymour's theatre. Now, Knowles had a

friend largely in the insurance business, and in order to do that friend a good turn he asked Seymour to insure in some company he was agent for, instead of with the company he was already insured with. Seymour good-naturedly consented. He was not a very careful business man; rather the reverse. The old insurance lapsed in the meantime, and before Seymour had made arrangements to insure in the other company the theatre was accidentally burned down, and he was left—well, very much in Queer Street. It is quite true that he never recovered the loss.

Brooke knew as well as anyone the many good points in Seymour's disposition, and he knew in how much he was a creature of circumstances, therefore in business matters he generously treated him with an indulgence he would not have extended to any other. There can be no doubt that Brooke's disposition was most generous. Perhaps you have heard the history of one case in which he displayed the most thoughtful and kindly generosity. One day Brooke visited the house of an actor who was lying very ill—in his last illness, in fact. The poor man was in wretched circumstances, and there was every prospect that his wife and children would after his death be in a condition bordering on destitution. When Brooke left the sick man's bedside, on the occasion of his visit, he sat for a little while in another room talking to the wife. Presently he found some excuse to send the woman into the sick-room. In her absence he hurriedly placed something in a plated teapot which stood on the sideboard. The sick actor died, and a short time after the death, the widow, on going to the sideboard to move the things off it, discovered a roll of notes amounting nearly to £100 in the teapot.

I remember one very curious experience Brooke had at one of our local institutions. One day the great actor strolled in to see his friend, J—— H——, in the city.

"I am going up to the Lunatic Asylum," he said. "Will you come?"

It seemed a rather odd proposal, but, as the visit was only for a friendly inspection of the beautifully-situated institution, the friend agreed, and the two soon afterwards presented themselves at the asylum. Dr. Power, who was at that time resident medical superintendent, received the visitors with his usual kindness; he was delighted to make the acquaint-

ance of the famous tragedian, with whose performances on the stage he was so familiar. After the visitors had been hospitably entertained by the good doctor and his clever and amiable lady (the sweetest singer of Irish melodies I ever heard anywhere), they were shown all that visitors could be shown of the asylum. They went into several departments of the asylum, amongst the poor afflicted people who were so tenderly cared for. They came at length to a room where a number of "harmless" women-patients were. When they entered, they found a number of women sitting around the room, chanting a sort of polka song, while a young and very pretty girl, who occupied the middle of the room, was engaged in entertaining her fellow-patients with the graceful gestures of the "shawl dance"—a saltatory folly very much in vogue at the period, but much more suitable for the inmates of lunatic asylums than for anyone else. When the visitors entered, the girl stopped her dance abruptly and ran into the corridor, from which she glanced shyly into the room. The poor girl was very pretty, and seemed very much above the usual class of patient.

"Come here, Julia," the doctor said, "and sing a song for us."

Julia smiled, and shook her head to indicate refusal.

"If you sing that pretty little French song," the doctor said, "I'll give you a nice glass of wine."

Then Julia came into the room.

"I'll not trust you," she said, with the queer, cunning look lunatics so often assume. She spoke with an English accent.

"Oh, I'll certainly give you the wine," the doctor said, laughing.

"Well, I'll sing," she said. "But, mind now," she exclaimed, turning to the visitors, "he must give the wine."

Then she sang a pretty French ballad in a sweet contralto, and the visitors were very pleased.

"This is Mr. Brooke, the tragedian," the doctor said to Julia, "and he's very pleased with your singing."

Julia stared at the actor, as if trying to recall his face.

"Are you Gustavus Vaughan Brooke?" she said. "Bless me! the last time I saw you was in Plymouth, at the theatre. I remember you quite well now. "Look here!" she said,

as if suddenly struck by a bright idea, "I'll tell you what I'll do. You actors generally take a benefit before leaving the town. I have a sister in the house, who sings soprano. We'll sing for your benefit. If you announce two lunatics, soprano and contralto, for your benefit, you'll have a crowded house."

Then she laughed insanely. The visitors laughed too as they passed out at the girl's odd idea, and Brooke's friends joked him a great deal about the offer of the lunatic singer.

Brooke had a thorough contempt for "the classes," when they did not behave properly in public, and nothing used to vex him more than the conduct of persons who behaved badly in the theatre because they thought their position entitled them to disregard the opinions of others. He was himself a thorough gentleman in manners. He was well-born and well brought up, and he never could tolerate boorishness in persons who ought to know better.

A curious incident occurred in the Cork Theatre one night. Brooke was playing to a crowded house. In one of the stage boxes were two "gentlemen," who gave great annoyance to some of the actresses on the stage by persistently ogling them and making a variety of signs, and behaving themselves generally in a very improper way towards those on the stage. Brooke's quick eye took in the situation at a glance. Making his way gradually over to the box, still seemingly intent on the character he was playing, the actor found an opportunity to say in a low tone to the occupants of the box: "I have been observing you for some time. Your conduct is that of blackguards. If you don't desist, I'll jump into that box and throw you into the pit." Low as was the intimation, it was overheard by the people in the front seats. Such an uproar arose that the two "gentlemen" were obliged to slink out of the theatre. They'd have fared badly if the gallery lads had caught them. That was something like the incident, you will remember, a few years ago in the present Cork Theatre, when a well-known English opera-singer, Madame C—— A——, approached a stage box where some rude fellows were behaving very badly, and said, between some bars of "Maritana" music: "If you don't stop, I'll slap your face!" They stopped. These yahoos were officers stationed in the

Cork garrison. One night, when Brooke was playing in Glasgow, I believe, he thrashed some "swells" who had insulted one of the ladies of his company.

Brooke had, as I already have told you, a host of friends in Cork, but I don't think there was anyone for whom he cherished a greater feeling of esteem and regard than Mr. J—— H——, whose name I have mentioned in connection with the asylum incident. One night during the 1853 visit—it was the Friday night in which he took his famous benefit in the part of "Sir Giles Overreach"—he presented his friend (in the theatre) with a beautiful copy of Pope's poems he had used one night on the stage. It is a neat volume in green leather and gold, and it bears this inscription in a fine even handwriting:

"To J—— H——, with best wishes for the health and prosperity of himself, wife, and family, from his sincere friend,

"GUSTAVUS VAUGHAN BROOKE.

"Cork, August 26th, 1853."

And he wrote to that friend the day after his successful *début* in London:

"Just a line to tell you of my splendid success. Audience most enthusiastic. All the morning papers speak well of me."

The letter was written hastily, and from the theatre, so anxious was Brooke that his friends in Cork should know from himself at the earliest how well he was faring in London.

You ask me what character Brooke played best? Well, I think he played all characters so well it is scarcely right to make a distinction, but there were certain characters he played better than others—played so well as to raise him above all other actors of his time. I never knew anyone who exercised the same magnetic influence over an audience, who so completely swayed them, and made them feel the emotions he felt on the stage. I use the word *felt* advisedly, because Brooke seemed actually to *feel* the emotion he appeared to simulate. After the last scene in "A New Way to Pay Old Debts," he used to lie prostrate for fully twenty minutes, quite overcome by his realization of the part. One night someone said—"Brooke, you ought to give up playing that part. The strain is too much." And Brooke turned around and said, as if amazed, "Why, what

nonsense, it doesn't hurt me ; it is one of my best parts !” But in all parts Brooke was great, for he was gifted with the spirit—the rare attribute of heart and soul—without which acting is but the poor cold exercise of the elocutionist's art, devoid of the warm life, the spark of real feeling and the power of real emotion that make the acting of a genius so precious. With Brooke tears *were* tears, and his cries of sorrow had in them something that gave them an echo in the hearts of the spectators. I might truly say of him, as the poet Thomas Campbell said of John Kemble, the actor, in his farewell ode—

“ His was the spell o'er hearts
Which only acting lends—
The youngest of the sister arts
Where all their beauty blends.”

for in his acting there was a rare and surpassing beauty such as could not fail to charm. In his “Hamlet,” his “Macbeth,” his “Shylock,” his “Romeo,” his “Richard III.,” in fact, in all his Shakespeare parts he was a very pattern of excellence.

“ But who forgets that white discrowned head,
Those bursts of Reason's half-extinguished glare,
Those tears upon Cordelia's bosom shed
In doubt more touching than despair ?”

For his portrayal of the sorrows of “weak despised Lear” was one of his finest impersonations, it was so full of the penetrating pathos that brings tears. Of all the many characters which Brooke from time to time represented, there was, I am quite sure, not one in which his greatness as an actor became so clearly apparent as in his impersonation of “Othello.” As a dramatic study, his reading of the part was of high value, and his realization of the character in general was a thing when once witnessed to be for ever remembered. No actor I ever saw seemed to realize so fully the possibilities of this great creation of Shakespeare's genius. His acting of the part was distinguished by a breadth and grandeur that placed it far beyond the efforts of other great actors. He displayed a noble appreciation of all that was noble in “Othello,” and all that was defective he brought out with a distinctness that made the contrasts of the character the more striking. In his pathos he was infinitely touching, in his passion he was

terrific. He made a very distinct turning-point of the character at the part where "Iago" makes his first suggestion against the honour of Cassio—

"Is he not honest?"

I shall never forget the look Brooke as "Othello" used to flash upon "Iago," as the first suspicion of "Desdemona" dawned upon him like some awful nightmare, seeming to blight his very soul with its pernicious presence. And in the subsequent scenes he gave us a picture incomparable in its pure perfection of the great mind overthrown by a foul suspicion, the barbaric nature rising rebellious against all the better inspirations of a great and absorbing love, the simple, honest, trustful disposition warped and destroyed by the promptings of "the green-eyed monster," the good man and brave soldier abused and hoodwinked, wrecked in a whirlwind of his own raising, bursting with murderous hands the bonds of a union hallowed at least by the love of a pure and faithful wife—

"What soul was not resigned entire,
To the deep sorrows of the Moor?"

when those sorrows were portrayed by such a master-mind as that of Gustavus Vaughan Brooke. It was a great dramatic picture in which his superb acting made him the splendid centre-figure.

Some time after his memorable visit to Cork in 1853, Brooke went to Australia and his success there was great. But, unfortunately, he indulged in speculation as a theatrical proprietor in Melbourne, and lost the bulk of his fortune in that enterprise. He was induced, I believe, to go in for proprietorship by a man named Coppin, who once played in the Cook Street theatre, but who, in Melbourne, rose to a position of great prosperity. He had, I believe, a seat in the legislative assembly. It was all a huge mistake, because Brooke, though great as an actor, had no capacity whatever as a manager, in fact, as a man of business, he was decidedly lax. I cannot tell you anything about the misfortunes of Brooke. We lost sight of him for years, but we were all sorry to hear from time to time that he fared rather badly, and we were sorry to hear that in some respects he was a "changed man." Exactly ten years elapsed before we again saw him in Cork. The first intimation we had of his coming

was in a letter he wrote his friend in Patrick Street. See, here it is :—

“Theatre Royal, Manchester.

“June 29th, 1862.

“MY DEAR H—, I have a very great desire to see Cork, and have the pleasure of shaking your hand once more ere I again sail for the Antipodes, which I purpose doing about the latter end of October or November, and, if possible, I should like to combine a little business with pleasure. Will you, therefore, kindly enlighten me on matters in a theatrical point of view? My engagement here has been extended to the 21st of July, and I afterwards visit Liverpool, and my time will be occupied till the end of August. Trusting you are well, and that I may have an opportunity of describing to you ‘the battles, sieges, fortunes that I have passed’ and hearing from you in the meantime at your earliest convenience,

“I am, my dear James,

“Yours very sincerely,

“GUSTAVUS V. BROOKE.”

But it was not till the spring of the next year, 1863, that Brooke again visited Cork. How glad all his friends were to see him! Yet how earnestly some of us wished that he had not come. It was plain to us all from the first that a great change had come over our favourite, and for a while we scarcely knew what to think of it. Our friend had lost the brightness and gaiety of his disposition, the shadow of the world’s cares lay more darkly upon his brow than they had ever done before. In many respects he had altered, and the alteration was not improvement. We all knew how heavily Brooke had lost in Melbourne, for in reference to his projected revisiting of Australia, he said—“I am going to the place where I lost one fortune, to try to make another.” But the trouble of financial losses was not sufficient to cause such an alteration in his appearance, for Brooke was now, in many respects, only a wreck of his former self.

We were not long in discovering the cause. Brooke had sought consolation where so many—even of the greatest men in the greatest ages—have sought it and failed to find it. The curse of intemperance had fallen upon our great actor, threatening ere long to quench the brilliant light of his intellect. Let me speak gently of this dire failing in one who had so long been a pattern of all that was good in his profession, let me touch with light and sparing hand the sad episodes that marked the close of a great career, for, while

the evil habit was growing strong upon him, he struggled bravely to preserve his art from all reproach, and to exercise his talent in this time of trouble and temptation, even as he did in the old days.

This last visit of Brooke was made, in one sense, under most favourable circumstances, because the company supporting him came here under the management of Harris, the lessee of the Theatre Royal, Hawkins' Street, Dublin. All the parts were undertaken by very capable people. The second parts were sustained by an actor named Cowper, of the Theatre Royal, Liverpool, and amongst the company was that admirable comedian, Granby. I well remember his "Gobbo" in the "Merchant of Venice" was the best I ever saw. All the plays were splendidly mounted. The engagement commenced in the second week in April, and opened with "Othello," next "Merchant of Venice," "Richelieu," "Virginius," "New Way to Pay Old Debts," "Othello" (second time), "Hamlet," "Stranger," "Richard III.," "Othello" (third time), "The Wife," and "The Serious Family," and last night "Love's Sacrifice, or the Rival Merchants," in which Brooke played the part of "Matthew Elmore." It was quite plain to everyone that Brooke was taking more stimulants than he ought to ; yet, strange to say, his acting was as fine as ever. The people came in crowds to see him, and though some nights it was plain to the audience, as well as to those behind the scenes, that the actor was under some other influence than that of dramatic inspiration, the actor bore his part superbly, and his acting had all the old beauty. I have often told you how great he was in "Virginius." Well, the night he played it during that last engagement he made a profound impression. In that sad last scene where "Virginius" comes upon the bronze urn containing the ashes of his beloved daughter, Brooke's acting was inexpressibly pathetic. As he fell forward on the urn, clasping it to his heart with a cry of sorrow, I glanced round, and saw tears trickling down the cheeks of those around me. On the Saturday night I saw the finest performance of "Othello" I ever saw before or since then. I can never hope to see the like again. On the Monday following it was "Hamlet," and, oh ! how sad a spectacle it was ! There could be no doubt Brooke was—how can I whisper it—drunk ! The fact was not to be

disguised. A feeling of sadness and gloom fell over all the house—a crowded house, too—at the sight of this dismal *fiasco*, this lurching, incoherent “Hamlet.” I was behind the scenes, and I knew when Brooke was going on the stage that he had too much brandy, and that he would never pull through the play. I was sitting in the green-room during that beautiful scene with “Ophelia” commencing, “My lord, I have remembrances of yours,” etc. Brooke was so bad I could not bear to witness his failure. When the scene was over the charming young actress who played “Ophelia”—Miss Sarah Thorne was her name—entered the room in a state of painful agitation.

“Isn’t it too bad, Mr. —?” she said, appealing to me. “He has ruined the scene, but I can’t be angry with him, for he’s the best-natured fellow ever lived.”

At that moment Brooke came into the room, rather unsteadily, and, shaking a chiding finger at Miss Thorne, exclaimed—“Ah, young lady, I caught you tripping to-night; you missed your lines!” This was adding insult to injury, after he had spoiled the scene himself by telescoping his lines. Miss Thorne was speechless with indignation. She looked at me, and left the room in silence.

“I’m not quite all right to-night,” Brooke said to me, half-apologetically. “I’m not quite well, and the people in front are a bit unreasonable sometimes.”

In the graveyard scene, poor Brooke was so palpably tipsy that there were some sounds of disapprobation from the patient audience—a hiss, or some such sound. I was not looking on at the time, but I believe Brooke came forward and addressed the audience, saying whether they blamed him or praised him, applauded or hissed, he should always respect the judgment of a Cork audience. Then the people were sorry, and sat out the rest of the play in silence. In the last scene Brooke was so unsteady that he had to be propped up at the wing to get through the fight in a sort of way. It was a sad performance, indeed, and we were not sorry the curtain fell. After “The Stranger” next night, Brooke played “O’Callaghan” in “His Last Legs.” Brooke’s Irish comedy was simply perfect. I have not seen the part played since, till a few years ago, when I saw Mr. Leonard Boyne in it, who played it delightfully, with the utmost humour and refinement. In that last engagement

Brooke took his benefit on the Friday of the second week, in "The Wife" and "The Serious Family." When the curtain fell and he was recalled, he made a short speech. He said: "Ladies and Gentlemen—Allow me to thank you for "the very high honour and compliment you have paid me by "your presence here this evening. Allow me, at the same "time, to assure you that I feel deeply the favours that you "have hitherto conferred on me, and that you appreciated my "earlier efforts shall always be remembered by me." This speech was greeted with great cheering.

After that engagement G. V. Brooke was lost to us for ever. You know the sad story of his tragic death, how when he was on his way to Australia in the steamship "London," that vessel foundered in the Bay of Biscay,* and how Brooke nobly perished, leaving to others the place he might have taken among the survivors in the boats. There were women on board, and men and women in the boats. "Better death than dishonour," were the words he uttered, as he faced his doom in the sinking ship. It was a death worthy of such a man. Many actors have come and gone since then—I have seen the best of them; I have enjoyed their acting—but for none of them have I felt a spark of the deep regard and admiration I felt for that rare genius, Gustavus Vaughan Brooke."

The light of other days is gone out, the genial presence is no more, the old play-goer has passed away, and with him has died many a humorous anecdote, many a pathetic story that beguiled the leaden-footed hours of humdrum everyday existence. A fairer light than the daylight of this dull cold earth has, I pray, dawned upon one who had long outlived the joys of youth and many friendships, but who, even to the end of his time, cherished a vivid recollection of the roses and the rue he plucked so plentifully in the noon-tide of his life. The effort of a memory which is tenacious regarding all that relates to a dear friend has, in some respects, I fear, not been all that might be desired. Yet it is only in trifles of detail it can have failed. The pictures *he* drew with such a skilful hand, the light and shade, the colours and the figures of his canvas, have been faithfully

* Jan. 11th, 1866, there were 269 persons lost in the "London."

preserved. Now, when all is told, again "the golden light is blurred away" by the obscuring mist of years through which so many eyes see but faintly the bright landscape of happy earlier days—

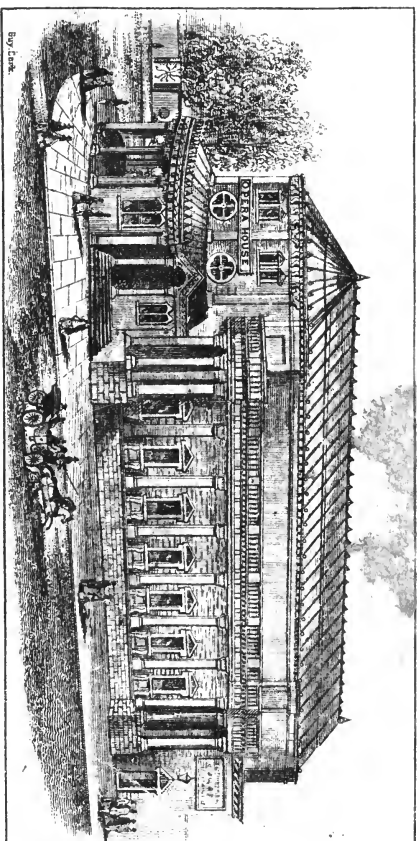
"Now Time his dusky pennons o'er the scene
Closes in steadfast darkness, and the past
Fades from our charmed sight. My task is done."

And as I fold up and put away once more the faded, treasured pages that often remind me of so much that was good and true, I humbly breathe a hope that these little glimpses of the past have given someone else a tithe of the pleasure in the reading that they have given me in the writing, and that someone else has had a heart of welcome for these old memories that steal upon me at times like distant music in the stilly summer night, bringing once more the thought of the dear old friend who is sleeping the long, long sleep that must last till "the glory which is brighter than the sun," shall light with its radiance the last vestige of "the great globe itself," when all the old voices shall sound anew with the sweet freshness of perpetual youth, drowning the last cry of Earth in the hymn of praise that never ceases—the pæan of joy that is everlasting; all the dim old eyes shall glow with the lustre that never fades, all the old hearts shall be lightened of their burdens, and all the old feet, now weary of travelling on the steep and thorny paths of earthly life, shall find their rest forever and forever.









THE PRESENT CORK THEATRE.

(The Cork Opera House Company, Limited.)

THIS building was formerly known as "the Athenæum," and for many years was used for concerts, lectures, etc. In 1873 it was internally altered so as to be better suited for dramatic entertainments. It was opened on March 15th, 1873, as "The Munster Hall." In 1877 the building was entirely reconstructed by the well-known architect, Mr. Phipps, and on the 17th September, that year, it was re-opened in its present form, Mr. Wm. Duck's "Our Boys" Company being engaged for the first week.

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